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A PLEA FOR EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE.

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TO PREPARE NEGROES FOR PARTICIPATION IN A MULTIRACIAL, OPEN SOCIETY, NEGRO COLLEGES MUST OFFER THEIR STUDENTS A QUALITY EDUCATION. BEFORE THIS CAN OCCUR, HOWEVER, THE ACADEMIC DEFICIENCIES WHICH EVEN IN COLLEGE CHARACTERIZE NEGRO STUDENTS MUST BE ELIMINATED. THUS, NEGRO COLLEGES SHOULD CONTINUE TO OFFER REMEDIAL INSTRUCTION TO THEIR STUDENTS, AND AT THE SAME TIME RAISE THEIR EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS. ALSO, THE NEGRO COLLEGE CURRICULUM SHOULD CONTINUE TO OFFER A WIDE VARIETY OF DISCIPLINES AND INFORMAL COURSES OF STUDY. NEGRO STUDENTS THEMSELVES MUST RECOGNIZE THEIR RESPONSIBILITY TO OVERCOME EDUCATIONAL DEFICIENCIES AND TO GAIN CULTURAL ENRICHMENT. THAT THESE UNDERACHIEVING YOUTH POSSESS ACADEMIC POTENTIAL IS WITNESSED BY THE SUCCESS OF SUCH COLLEGE RECRUITMENT PROGRAMS AS "NEGRO OPPORTUNITY AT HOFSTRA (NOAH)." MOREOVER, EXCELLENT AND VARIED OCCUPATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AWAIT THE QUALIFIED NEGRO WHO GRADUATES FROM COLLEGE. THIS ARTICLE WAS PUBLISHED IN "THE QUARTERLY REVIEW OF HIGHER EDUCATION AMONG NEGROES," VOLUME 35, NUMBER 3, JULY 1967. (LB)

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A Plea For Educational Excellence

By E. J. Josey

As we consider educational excellence, let us be ever mindful that the scientific advancements of these last few years and even the last few months are unparalleled. Investigations are being conducted in atomic research and unseen galaxies. Journeys to the planets are within our reach, and it is our hope that the kind of teaching, learning, and research that take place at Negro colleges will give us a chance to provide our country with Negro citizens in the advance parties to the planets in outerspace. In spite of all of our research, man needs to understand the dignity of humanity and the glories of nature.

Negro colleges are mashalling their forces to meet the challenges of the age of space and technology. Negro educators believe that the growth and development of moral, humanistic, social, and aesthetic values must parallel the conquest of space and technology. Thus, there are plans to strengthen our instructional programs and institute new curricular programs which will enhance moral, humanistic, social, and aesthetic values.

As one visits Negro colleges, the individual is immediately cognizant of the vast building construction that is taking place. Yes, there is a belief in excellence in education, which is truly a meaningful and significant assertion at the colleges, but there is a belief that excellence in architectural surroundings and a beautiful environment will help to set the environmental as well as the intellectual tone for study at these colleges. While Negro educators are not completely "behaviorist" in their thinking, that is, believing that the environment will uphold the intellectual tradition alone, they believe that during this period in our historical development, real learning and teaching must take place in these new buildings.

Why are we now committed to real learning and teaching which will lead to educational excellence at Negro colleges? A few years ago, we were training our young people for a Negro society. Today, we are educating young people for the Great Society, where race, color or creed will not be a hindrance to success.

No society can be a great society, without college students studying and planning to become great citizens. Citizens are not made great by big cars, big incomes, big houses or big gaps in their education, which may be seen in the poor use of the language and mediocrity displayed in every furor on their countenance. No citizen can take his place in a Great Society, if he spends all of his time in the student center rather than in the science laboratory and the college library. Young people in Negro colleges must realize that the Great Society demands that you begin to make great aims and great goals for tomorrow, today! Tomorrow will be too late!

Yes, tomorrow will be too late, for one authority reminds us that "Negro colleges admit freshmen that lag from one and half to three years behind national achievement norms. They are thus forced to spend one to two years on what amounts to remedial work, leaving only two years for college work."[1] The foregoing statement is a fact

[1]Lawrence E. Dennis, "Equalizing Opportunity for the Disadvantaged," in CURRENT ISSUES IN HIGHER EDUCATION, 1964, Washington, D. C., Association for Higher Education, NEA, 1964, p. 188.

that is difficult to accept. But we must swallow this bitter pill. If professor Dennis' assertion is true—and studies have shown beyond a shadow of a doubt that it is true —then, Negro students in every predominantly Negro college have a great challenge to face. Not only must we prepare our students for college while they are in college, but we must prepare them for college graduation and a lifetime of learning.

All of us know the reason why the Negro is outside of the mainstream of education. It is my belief that we have spent too much time crying about the reason, and very little effort has been made to improve education in our colleges.

Before we look at priorities for remedying the situation, let us examine another assertion made by Dr. Dennis. "The drop-out rate in Negro colleges is about three times that in other institutions. Few Negro college graduates go on to graduate school. Only eleven of the 1,500 recent Woodrow Wilson Fellowship winners were graduates of one of the predominantly Negro colleges. In sum, opportunity is limited, the loss of talent great."[2] What should we do to change this sorry state of affairs?

How can we educate for excellence in Negro colleges, when we have to offer remedial courses to help our students to overcome academic deficiencies from their secondary schools? How can we educate for excellence, if a large percentage of our students will drop out before graduation? How can we educate for excellence, when the chances are that none of our graduates will be a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship winner? As of this date, there have been only a few Negro Woodrow Wilson Fellows! These are difficult questions to answer. Nevertheless, the deans, the faculties, and the staffs of Negro colleges are constantly trying to grapple with these problems. Although I have painted a dismal picture, there is a ray of hope!

Negro colleges are now reaching out in many directions. They are now embracing different disciplines and courses of study in order to meet the practical needs of their students, that I outlined above. Negro educators recognize the fact that in English and mathematics it is necessary to offer remedial instruction. They recognize the fact that they must work harder to hold their students in school. But these scholars also recognize the fact that they must raise their standards. Negro educators must stress and over emphasize the importance of achievement and scholarship, in order to prepare our youngsters for the Great Society. Mediocrity must be deplored and excellence emphasized!

Earlier, I mentioned the fact that Negro colleges had embraced different disciplines and courses of study, in order to meet the needs of their students. Let us now examine what is being done in this area. In the first two years of most Negro colleges, an attempt is made to bridge the gap between high school and college. We also attempt to bridge the gap between the ancient and the modern; we try to bridge the gap between the arts which give aesthetic values and the sciences which inform; we try to bridge the gap between education for the good life and training for a vocation. Freshmen and sophomores are required to take courses in three divisions; the humanities, the natural sciences, and the social sciences. These three divisions provide a core of learning, which is a foundation on which to build majors and minors in the junior and senior years. An attempt is made to supplement the classroom with the laboratories, the library, the presentation of performing artists, lectures and art exhibi-

[2]Dennis. *Op. Cit.*, p. 189.

tions. All of these activities are designed to contribute to the students' well-being as a person and contribute to their development as educated men and women. The attempt to supplement classroom experiences with additional cultural experiences is based upon the belief, that one can become educated culturally in an informal as well as a formal situation. The former president of the University of Chicago, Dr. Robert Hutchins, agrees with this view when he stated that "a modern heresy is that all education is formal education and that formal education must assume the total responsibility for the full development of the individual."[3]

Last but not least, the colleges have assembled a great faculty, men and women of immense learning, to inspire these youngsters through their teaching to new levels of aspiration.

For the last few paragraphs, I have painted a portrait of what the colleges are doing to contribute to excellence in education. Now for the next few moments, let us turn to the Negro student's responsibilities in his quest for educational excellence.

In spite of the handicaps that Negro students possess, I am firmly convinced that they can overcome their educational deficiencies, in order to reach educational excellence. I do not believe that Negro college students are inherently dumb, because they come from culturally deprived environments. To document my belief, a recent study reported by Hofstra University of Long Island, New York, reveals that about eight Negro students were encouraged to enter the University by Hofstra's Dean of Students, Randall W. Hoffman. "By standard testing systems, none of the eight would have been admitted. Two had already applied and been turned down. Two others had been advised by their counselors that there was no need to apply. At the end of the summer, the eight students were given a five-week course of tutorial assistance and when the university's classes opened they were tutored during the entire first semester. The following semester they were put on their own. At the end of the year, Hoffman says the students were found to be 'academically better than the average student.' "[4] The foregoing story is proof enough for me that if a program of planned study is instituted, then we can have all of our students in Negro colleges achieving excellence.

A sequel to the Hofstra story is a report which appeared in the December 8, 1966 issue of the *New York Times.* The article indicated that "Abraham Aikin worked last summer as a junior clerk in a Manhattan branch of the First National City Bank." This young man was one "of the 75 young men and women hired by the bank, the nation's third largest and the second biggest in New York City, for the summer. But unlike most of the others, they were especially selected for employment because of their participation in an unusual educational experiment called project NOAH.

"The initials stand for Negro Opportunities at Hofstra and refer to the Hempstead, L. I. university's program for seeking out potentially talented and motivated youth from among the underachievers who would not normally have been admitted.

"A total of 60 students have received scholarships for tuition under the NOAH program, and most of them are still at Hofstra. However, university officials such as Dr. Frank N. Elliott, vice president, believe that employment opportunities must

[3]Robert M. Hutchins. THE HIGHER LEARNING IN AMERICA, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1936) p. 68.

[4]*Pittsburgh Courier,* May 29, 1965, 1,4.

complement the educational experiences for these students."

The foregoing report is a clear indication that after underachievers have been successfully motivated, which leads to success in college, coupled with job opportunities that will expand their horizons, it is possible to encourage Negro young people to aspire to college and university education as well as to the new job opportunities that are now available.

What must the Negro college student do to achieve excellence? In the first place, the student must recognize the fact in himself that he has educational deficiencies to overcome. In short, he must take Socrates' admonition, "know t h y s e l f," seriously! Whatever his shortcomings are – if they are in reading, mathematics, or language– he must begin to pay special attention to these areas and seek to remedy these deficiencies. He must not be afraid to seek out the faculty for special tutorial help. Negro colleges must have dedicated faculty who will be glad to give extra tutoring sessions. Students must not hesitate to seek the assistance of honor students. As a matter of fact, the Alpha Kappa Mu Honor Society and N.A.A.C.P. college chapters have tutorial programs that can aid in this endeavor.

In too many instances, students try to study in groups. It is my belief that in some disciplines, there is the need to engage in independent study rather than group study. Independent study makes for an independent mind, and independent minds constitute the ingredient of hope that culturally deprived students must possess in order to excel educationally.

There is a need for Negro college students to become more library centered. Wide reading stimulates thinking, clears up concepts, and helps build one's vocabulary. The library is an inexhaustible source of knowledge. It is important that they believe that books are great teachers.

It is true that in a large number of courses, there will be great concern with the acquiring of facts, but we must begin to suggest that one must not be filled with facts for the sake of facts. Who cares if one knows how tall the Empire State Building is. There must be concern if a student is not aware that there are certain truths about men and their environment that the educated man or woman must know. But what really is meaningful for the educated man or woman is the enlargement of their mental capacity that will make them responsive to change in a changing world. Therefore, we must admonish all Negro students to develop and manifest judgment, acquire social and aesthetic values, and view learning not as a chore but enjoy the experience of learning.

Negro students must look at fraternities, sororities and other extracurricular activities realistically. These activities are socially useful on the college campus, but too much emphasis in this area will lead to one's academic downfall. No one can say that I am anti-Greek, for I am a member of a fraternity. What I am trying to convey is the fact that too much emphasis in this area will not lead to academic excellence! If Negro students are in the words of Dr. Dennis, "from one and a half to three years behind national achievement norms," they do not have too much time left to engage in frivolous activities, if they really aspire for excellence.

There will be times that the Negro student will have to be sophisticated enough to know when to limit his extracurricular activities. Voter registration drives are necessary, but one must not neglect his study for an examination, in order to en-

gage in voter registration. What I am suggesting is that the serious student must set up a system of priorities, and study hard and work in voter registration and the cancer drive too. For the record, I must hasten to add that I am one who welcomes the concern among students about the great problems that confront our nation. We must abandon the old fashioned concept of the college campus as an "ivory tower." Involvement in our country's issues is a part of a student's education. But we must insist that there is equal involvement in intellectual matters as well.

It was indicated earlier that the colleges are trying to enrich cultural experiences with concerts, exhibitions and lectures, and that in essence, these experiences are informal educational experiences that, in themselves, will lead to educational excellence. Unfortunately, too many of our students do not avail themselves of these excellent opportunities. There are critics who have observed large numbers of empty seats at cultural affairs. The Negro student who hopes to overcome cultural deprivation must take advantage of all concerts, lectures, exhibitions, and visiting scholars who come to his campus. Not only should the Negro college student of 1967 take advantage of all of the cultural offerings on his campus, but he must also explore the cultural offerings in the community as well.

With reference to the community and the relationship of the Negro student to it, one authority contends that "a considered difficulty in the intellectual development of many Negro students is their almost complete separation from the literature, art, and music that the majority of the community takes for granted." It is true that Negro college students, in particular, and the Negro community, in general, have been separated "from the literature, art and music that the majority of the community takes for granted," but on the other hand, in too many instances, Negroes fail to take advantage of cultural affairs that are open to them in their communities. How many Negro students visit art exhibitions, concerts, and lecture series in the local communities where these colleges are located? Most of these cultural activities are now open to *all* people in a great number of Southern communities.

Turning to the world of occupations and work, there are excellent opportunities for Negro college graduates. Writing in the May 30, 1965 issue of the NEW YORK TIMES in an article entitled "Job Recruiters Hunt for Negroes in Stepped-up Drive at Colleges," Fred M. Hechinger stated that "some Negro colleges report that the number of personnel representatives who have visited their campuses exceeds the number of graduating seniors." One difficulty that we face is that so few of students are adventurous enough to go into the new fields of study. We need more mathematicians, chemists, Engineer Technicians and personnel for Advertising and Marketing. Nevertheless, most of our students continue to concentrate their studies in the same traditional fields.

Mr. Hechinger reveals in the same article that "Albert Barlow, second vice president of the Chase Manhattan Bank and coordinator of college recruiting efforts there warned: 'I don't think we've convinced the students of our sincerity.' He added that half of the Negro seniors who signed up for interviews had failed to appear." I am not so certain that the students are questioning the sincerity of the new offers; it is my belief that too many of our students are too afraid to venture out into new fields. Students must be advised to consider the new work opportunities. Before go-

ing for an interview, students should visit the library and look up information on the company. So many of young people do not impress the interviewers, for they do not know how to communicate. One must use more than one or two syllable words. One must also ask serious questions about the company.

Many people believe that dress is the most important consideration that one should think about, when going for an interview. Let me share Amherst's Dean of Admissions' view on this subject. About two years ago in the July 11, 1965 issue of the NEW YORK TIMES, in an article entitled "Clothes and the Man," that "Eugene S. Wilson, dean of admissions at Amherst College was invited by a "consumer education" organization to offer his "authoritative opinions" on "Dressing right" to make a good sartorial impression on the college admissions interview. The organization, though termed non-profit, represents commercial male fashion interests.

Dean Wilson's reply may have come as something of a shock. He wrote in part:

". . . Alas, your shot has hit the wrong target . . . for I am the worst-dressed man in the Amherst family. If you don't believe it, ask my wife who, for years, has carried on a strenuous campaign to improve the sartorial habits of her mate . . . I pay no attention to the way a man dresses for the interview. In fast, if he is dressed too immaculately, I become suspicious of him as a person who is trying to impress me by a false front. The man in the garment is what I want to know more about. . ."

The moral of this story is crystal clear! It is not the clothes that young Negroes wear that will qualify them for the job! It is the person in the clothes! Taking this thought one step further, it is the trained intellect in the clothes!

While it may sound like a cliche to affirm the fact that equal opportunity for all is an undeniable fact in our emerging Great Society, I must hasten to add that only those who are qualified will benefit from equal opportunity.

To illustrate this point, let me turn to the engineer. It is true that the modern engineer must be thoroughly conversant with mathematics and the physical sciences, but his special capability is the employment of his knowledge in the solution of social problems. Therefore, young people, it is equally important for the engineer to display on his transcript the fact that he has excelled in the Social Sciences as well as in physics and mathematics.

In this paper, I have engaged in just plain talk. It may seem odd that I have chronicled so many of our shortcomings. But, there are signs of encouragement, for we now know our weaknesses and can do something about them.

What are the encouraging signs? I see bright young Negro men and women, who are walking across our campuses and their faces radiate proof that they are willing to confront new and demanding conditions with innovation and boldness. I also see young faces who want to survive and conquer their educational deficiencies and pursue excellence. Yes, there are a few hopeful signs.

As we approach the making of a more Democratic America, I am optimistic that in spite of the challenges that we face, Negro students will excel and will be in the vanguard of exploring new frontiers.

The Negro College's faculty is a community of scholars, who are critical thinkers, and through their zeal for learning and love of young people, along with their dedication, they will guide the young men

and women of their institutions into new frontiers of knowledge. Turning to Negro students, I have great hopes for the future, for we have students who know that, if young men and women pursue excellence and if young men and women are to be the leaders of tomorrow, they must imagine comprehensively and intensively. Only through great minds will we have A Great Society.

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